



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199



AFES/MMM

MAY 9 2016

Ms. Suzan Simonds
Permits and Regulatory Manager
SAExploration
8240 Sandlewood Place, Suite 102
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Dear Ms. Simonds:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has received your request, dated January 19, 2016, for a Letter of Authorization (LOA) for the incidental take of polar bears during activities associated with SAExploration, Inc. (SAE) 2015-2016 Aklaq 3D winter seismic survey on the North Slope of Alaska.

On April 14, 2016, Service staff had a conversation with SAE staff to clarify the need for this LOA request. SAE is seeking a new LOA that will act as a time-extension of a pre-existing LOA (15-18). The activities in the LOA are the same as those described as part of LOA 15-18. More specifically, the activities in the new LOA will be focused on clean-up efforts resulting from the Aklaq 3D winter surveys.

In accordance with Service regulations 50 CFR 18 subpart J (76 FR 47010), published on August 3, 2011, please find enclosed LOA 16-03 authorizing the incidental take of small numbers of polar bears during oil and gas activities in association with SAE's 2015-2016 Aklaq 3D winter seismic survey on the North Slope of Alaska. A detailed description of the proposed activities is provided in the SAE *Aklaq 3D 2016/2017 Program Plan of Operations Winter Seismic Survey* (August 17, 2015).

Per the *Programmatic Biological Opinion for the Beaufort Sea Incidental Take Regulations for Polar Bear, Pacific Walrus, and Polar Bear Critical Habitat* (July 2011) issuance of this LOA also completes consultation for polar bears pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended. This LOA also serves as an "Incidental Take Statement," which is required by the ESA in order for incidental take to be authorized.

Ms. Simonds

2

Should you have any further questions regarding your LOA please contact Mr. Christopher Putnam at (907) 786-3844 or email at christopher_putnam@fws.gov.

Sincerely,

Acting C.S. Hewitt
Chief, Marine Mammals Management

Enclosures

Email cc: Mr. Richard Shideler, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement
North Slope Borough, Department of Law



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
1011 East Tudor Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199



AFES/MMM

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION Incidental Take (16-03)

ISSUED: June 1, 2016
EXPIRES: August 2, 2016

In accordance with regulations at 50 CFR 18 subpart J (76 FR 47010) published on August 3, 2011, SAExploration, Inc. (SAE) is authorized to take small numbers of polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) incidental to activities associated with the 2015-2016 Aklaq 3D winter seismic survey on the North Slope of Alaska.

The SAE proposes to conduct the 2015-2016 Aklaq 3D winter seismic survey activities from June 1, 2016, through August 2, 2016. As part of LOA 15-18, SAE conducted 3D winter seismic surveys on land and in near-shore areas between the Canning River and the Sagavanirktok River on the North Slope of Alaska. The survey area encompassed approximately 1512 square miles and will include parts or all of the following townships: U0010N016E through U0010N024E; U009N016E through U009N024E; U008N017E through U008N024E; U007N015E through U007N023E; U006N015E through U006N023E; U005N015E through U005N023E. A detailed description and map of the proposed activities is provided in the SAE *Aklaq 3D 2016/2017 Program Plan of Operations Winter Seismic Survey* (August 17, 2015). As part of LOA 16-03, SAE proposes to complete clean-up work as a result of the 3D winter seismic survey activities and as described in SAE's aforementioned *Plan of Operations* (August 17, 2015).

This LOA and the required conditions below apply to all SAE employees, contractors, and personnel performing SAE-approved work for the project described above. This LOA stipulates the following conditions:

- 1) This LOA authorizes incidental take only.
- 2) SAE must comply with all requirements listed at 76 FR 47010 (August 3, 2011) and 50 CFR §18.128.
- 3) The SAE shall report all polar bear sightings, signs of polar bears (e.g., tracks or excavations), and any potential dens to the Service MMM using the polar bear observation report, within 24 hours via email to fw7_mmm_reports@fws.gov.

805 m (0.5 mile) of such areas. When weather conditions do not allow a 457 m (1,500 ft) flying altitude, such as during severe storms or when cloud cover is low, aircraft may be operated below the 457 m (1,500 ft) altitude stipulated above. However, when aircraft are operated at altitudes below 457 m (1,500 ft) because of weather conditions, the operator must avoid areas of known polar bear location and should take precautions to avoid flying directly over or within 805 m (0.5 mile) of these areas.

- iii. Plan all aircraft routes to minimize any potential conflict with active or anticipated polar bear subsistence hunting activity as determined through community consultations.
- 3) Holders of a LOA must conduct their activities in a manner that, to the greatest extent practicable, minimizes adverse impacts on the availability polar bears for subsistence uses.
- (b) Monitoring: Depending on the location, timing, and nature of proposed activities, holders of a LOA will be required to do the following:
- i. Maintain trained, Service-approved, onsite observers to carry out monitoring programs for polar bears necessary for initiating adaptive mitigation responses. Polar bear monitors: Polar bear monitors will be required under the monitoring plan if polar bears are known to frequent the area or known polar bear dens are present in the area. Monitors will act as an early detection system for polar bear activity near Industry activity.
- 2) Develop and implement a site specific, Service-approved, marine mammal monitoring and mitigation plan to monitor and evaluate the effects of authorized activities on polar bears, and the subsistence use of this resource. The marine mammal monitoring and mitigation plan must enumerate the number of polar bears encountered during specified activities, estimate the number of incidental takes that occurred during specified seismic activities, and evaluate the effectiveness of prescribed mitigation measures. The SAE Interaction Plan cited 7(a)(1)(iii) of this LOA satisfies this requirement.
- 3) Cooperate with the Service and other designated Federal, State, and local agencies to monitor the impacts of oil and gas activities in the Beaufort Sea on polar bears. Where insufficient information exists to evaluate the potential effects of proposed activities on polar bears and the subsistence use of these resources, holders of a LOA may be required to participate in joint monitoring and/or research efforts to address these information needs and insure the least practicable impact to these resources. Information needs in the Beaufort Sea include, but are not limited to:
- i. Distribution, abundance, and habitat use patterns of polar bears in offshore environments; and
 - ii. Cumulative effects of multiple simultaneous operations on polar bears.

If you have any further questions regarding your LOA please contact Mr. Christopher Putnam at (907) 786-3844 or email at christopher_putnam@fws.gov.

C.S. Heine

Acting _____
Chief, Marine Mammals Management

5.9.16

Date